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Skunkworks: Designing Regional Innovation Spaces for the Creative Fringe

Workshop Positioning Paper

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ABSTRACT

Innovation is a buzz word that continues to be used in various ways in commercial and political contexts as a passe-partout for economic development and regional prosperity. As a result, innovation spaces, hubs and precincts are often heralded as a panacea by government and industry to bring about a start-up and entrepreneurial culture. However, many innovation spaces exclude people and community groups who could potentially make a useful contribution to innovation. In this positioning paper, we are interested in unpacking the innovation narrative and looking more closely at the types of spaces designed to enable citizens to participate in and contribute to innovation – using both physical and digital means.

CCS CONCEPTS

Human-centered computing → Interaction design theory, concepts and paradigms • **Social and professional topics** → Geographic characteristics, Cultural characteristics

KEYWORDS

innovation, regional innovation, innovation hubs, STEM, start-ups, social entrepreneurship, digital participation, living labs, maker spaces

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OUTLINE

Withers [2] and Foth [1] argue that we need not just STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), but also researchers from the social sciences, arts, design and the humanities contributing to innovation. In the Australian context, Withers says:

The focus on STEM education in recent years is very important. But it must be equally complemented by humanities and social science enhancement. The latter disciplines are necessary to understand ourselves and the cultures and societies in which Australia wants to operate and engage, and to build creative and cultural industries.

Using the challenge of a more inclusive participation approach towards innovation strategies, we intend to contribute a full length paper for peer review to the proposed journal special issue structured in three parts: (1) We will first review the qualities and characteristics of what is typically referred to as an innovation space or hub from a designerly perspective. (2) We will contrast these patterns with empirically grounded findings derived from a three year research program focussing on “Fostering digital participation through Living Labs in regional and rural Australian communities.” Specifically, we will look at examples of alternative and vernacular forms of innovation spaces (“skunkworks”) that attract and include different people – what we call the “creative fringe.” The spaces we examine are a mobile maker space in Townsville, a youth arts theatre space in Toowoomba, and a creative entrepreneurship space in Nambour in regional Queensland. (3) Finally, juxtaposing these two genres of innovation spaces, we recommend a more inclusive approach to the design of both innovation spaces and innovation policy.

REFERENCES

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